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ABSTRACT

To explore the relationship between occupational stressors and educational administration, a random sample of 226 Oklahoma administrators was given an administrative stress questionnaire. The administrators--including 52 superintendents, 50 central office administrators, 61 secondary principals, and 63 elementary principals--were all enrolled at the University of Oklahoma for certification at higher or different levels. Variables covered in the questionnaire included administrative position, age, sex, perceived stressfulness of the job, health and illness patterns, leisure-time physical activities, and 16 stressful situations, such as emergencies, need to get things done on time, overwork, and unclear responsibilities. Data analysis allowed construction of characteristic profiles of stress/strain components for each administrator group and also yielded a number of general findings. The results indicated that administrative roles were perceived as moderately stressful; that time utilization (the need to get things done), communication problems, and workload were the most common types of stressors; that hypertension was reported by males only; and that physical activity was common. A copy of the questionnaire is appended. (Author/RW)

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OCCUPATIONAL STRESSORS AND ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE IN EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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This paper is prepared for and presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association in Montreal, April, 1983.

EA 015 660

ABSTRACT

OCCUPATIONAL STRESSORS AND ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE IN EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Educational administrators are characteristically upward-mobile (Presthus, 1962), high in need for power (McClelland, et al, 1980), and more oriented toward increased academic success (Glass, 1977). Increased pressure to continue academic recognition through certification and degree programs tends to produce increases in Type A, highly stress-oriented behavior pattern (Waldron, et al, 1980). The problem for this research is: What is the relationship between selected occupational stressors and the administrative role in educational organizations? The population was public school administrators in the State of Oklahoma who aspire to certification at higher or different levels. A random sample of superintendents (N=52), central office administrators (N=50), secondary principals (N=61), and elementary principals (N=63) was selected from individuals enrolled in classes in educational administration at the University of Oklahoma. Data were gathered by means of the Administrative Stress Questionnaire. The method of analysis could be referred to as documentation (Carini, 1975) in an effort to construct prototypic profiles of stress/strain components characteristic of each administrative group studied. Administrative roles were perceived as moderately stressful, however, only few specific organizational stressors were identified. "The need to get things done on time" was the most common stressor identified. Some gender differences in stress patterns were identified as were lesser differences in the administrative roles studied. Physical activity was common and may be related to lower than anticipated levels of stress.

OCCUPATIONAL STRESSORS AND ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE IN EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Thomas Wiggins, University of Oklahoma

Introduction

It has been estimated that one out of every four persons in the United States is suffering "severe emotional stress," though they are not perceived as suffering from any diagnosable mental or other illness (President's Commission on Mental Health, 1978). Although health professionals have long recognized the significant influence stress plays in the study and diagnosis of ill health, it has only been recently that specific estimates regarding the nature of this influence have been made. Estimates relating diagnosable illness to stress range from 70-90 percent (Stroebel, 1979). People are dying from stress-related disorders, primarily arteriosclerosis and associated coronary heart disease at higher rates than other times in recorded history. In 1980 almost 400,000 Americans died of diagnosed problems related to coronary heart disease (Kornblum, 1980).

Although stress has long been viewed as the major risk factor for coronary heart disease (CHD), only recently has the fast-pace personality-style, or what Friedman and Rosenman (1974) refer to as "Type A behavior," been accepted as a major risk factor for heart disease. The coronary prone behavior pattern, as described by Dembroski, et al (1978), is associated with a predominant work-orientation, hurried, impatient style often manifesting a preoccupation with deadlines. These persons are twice as likely as others to develop CHD (Rosenman, 1974).

External and internal demands upon persons are referred to as "stressors." Work environments can be characterized by the type and intensity of stressors. In a study of the school principals Koff, Laffey, Olson, and Cichon (1981) in a factor analysis found that forty-eight stressors associated with the principalship constellated into four factors: (1) helplessness/security, (2) management tasks/problem solving, (3) teacher conflict, and (4) student conflict. In examining the contents of critical decision-making scenarios written by school executives, content analyses revealed general types of stressors (Wiggins, 1981):

1. Failure of bosses to understand you
2. Emergencies
3. The need to get things done on time
4. Dislike by/lack of acceptance by co-workers
5. Fear of making errors/consequences
6. Lack of communication
7. Being overworked
8. Inability to influence immediate supervisor's decisions and actions that affect you
9. Meetings
10. Lack of performance feedback
11. Lack of appreciation/recognition
12. Lack of support from supervisors
13. Unclear responsibilities
14. Lack of authority
15. Too much responsibility
16. Inability to satisfy conflicting demands of various people around you

The responses to these stressors are nonspecific and vary according to administrative role.

Educational administrators are characteristically upward-mobile (Presthus, 1962), high in need for power (McClelland, Floor, Davidson, and Saron, 1980), and more oriented toward increased academic success (Glass, 1977). Increased pressure to continue academic recognition through certification and degree programs tends to produce increases in Type A behavior

pattern (Waldron, et al 1980). The 'Coronary Prone Behavior Pattern" and "Type A Behavior" are synonymous categories to describe the predominent characteristics of the educational administrator. Although Type A Behavior and CHD are related and lead to higher incidents of ill health, Type A educational administrators are more often rewarded with increased occupational success (Waldron, et al 1977).

The problem for this research is: What is the relationship between selected occupational stressors and the administrative role in educational organizations? The purpose will be to examine the nature of the administrative assignment, age, sex, stressfulness of the job, health/illness patterns, and leisure time physical activities as they relate to selected occupational stressors derived from the content analyses of critical decision-making scenarios confronted by educational administrators. The result will be the creation of profiles relating occupational stressors and administrative roles in educational organizations.

Theoretical Framework

Occupational stressors and the manifestations of stress have been investigated by Weiman (1977) in a study of 1,540 administrative employees. He found that four job factors were positively correlated with heavy smoking, hypertriglyceridemia, hypertensions, arteriosclerosis, hypercholesterolemia, obesity and peptic ulcer. The four factors were: (1) too much or too little to do; (2) extreme ambiguity or rigidity in relation to one's tasks; (3) too much or too little role conflict, and (4) too much or too little responsibility. Caplan, et al (1975) reported two commonly occurring occupational stressors: (1) low social support from others at work;

and (2) work overload. These findings support the theoretical considerations of French, Cobb, and Rodgers (1982) in their "person-environment fit" theory. The person-environment fit theory predicts that at times when the work environment fails to meet the needs and abilities of the worker, the worker develops distress which often leads to specific illnesses. The theory is based upon the basic concepts of organizational stress and individual strain. These concepts interact in a manner that effects worker health. Organizational stress refers to those conditions within the work environment that create overload and/or resource allocation and reward discrepancies. Individual strain refers to undesirable or unhealthy responses from workers that occur as a result of the organizational stress. These responses include both physiological and psychological responses.

Person-environment fit theory can be thought of as a theoretical spin-off of Darwin's notions of "survival of the fittest." Theories which deal with survival, such as Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS), explain the biochemical adaptations relevant to preparation for action, but they may be incomplete in social settings. Human action may become inhibited in social settings, and the inhibitions may become the etiological factors which lead to symptoms of individual strain such as hypertension. In that sense the hypertension becomes an observable manifestation of organizational stress and the general health of the organization. This constitutes a symbiotic relationship relevant to better understanding life in organizations.

Method

The population under study in this research is educational administrators

in public school settings in the State of Oklahoma who are upward mobile, aspiring to certification at higher or different levels. This includes superintendents, central office administrators, secondary principals, and elementary principals. A random sample of each of these groups was selected from individuals enrolled in classes in educational administration at the University of Oklahoma: superintendents (N=52); central office administrators (N=50); secondary principals (N=61); and elementary principals (N=63). It is recognized that such a sample of enrollees in courses places significant delimitations upon the generalizability of the findings to larger populations.

Data were gathered by means of a survey of job stress/strain factors. In an effort to gather data relevant to the domains of the "person-environment fit theory," items relevant to individual strain were defined as: age, sex, administrative role, health/illness patterns, perceived stressfulness of the job, and leisure time physical activities.* Items related to organizational stress were defined as sixteen organizational stressors derived from the content analyses of critical decision-making scenarios confronted by educational administrators (Wiggins, 1981). A survey instrument, The Administrative Stress Questionnaire, was constructed and pilot tested on a group of educational administrators (N=38) representative of the stratification indicated above in attendance at a weekend workshop conducted in the Spring of 1982 at the University of Oklahoma.

* Note: These particular variables were derived from an examination/interpretation of "Part I: Theoretical Perspectives on Stress and Anxiety" in Kutash, I., L. Schlesinger and Associates, Handbook on Stress and Anxiety, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1980.

This pilot test resulted in minor revisions in the format and clarity of item presentation.

Data were analyzed heuristically for each of the stratified groups of educational administrators, i.e., superintendents, central office administrators, secondary principals, and elementary principals in an effort to construct prototypic profiles of "stress/strain" components characteristic of each stratified group. The intent of this more exploratory mode of analysis is to provide bases for hypothesis generation to motivate further research aimed at studying specific relationships and differences between the variable domains of occupational stressors and administrative roles.

The method of analysis used in this study could be referred to as documentation as described by Carini (1975). Documentation is an accrual of perceptions enabling patterns of meanings to emerge through a network of information interpreted through the analysis of the observer in order to reveal the "integrity of the phenomena" (Carini, 1975). In this manner the analyses of data consists of the synthesis of data into a model or profile in an effort to explicate the more complex system (Lutz and Ramsey, 1974). "In a process of juxtaposing the data . . . the commonalities, differences, nuances, shadings of process as it was expressed through data can be articulated through graphic representation" (Carini, 1975, p. 37). Provisional profiles can then be formulated which provide sign-posts for the generation of hypotheses to be used by other researchers in the pursuit of additional data relevant to the variable domains of interest.

Results

The Administrative Stress Questionnaire provided data applicable to profile modeling in order to (1) gain insight into the manifestations of individual strain associated with the four educational administrator categories, and (2) reveal the pattern of the relationship between the organizational role and the occupational stressor(s).

The Superintendent

In this sample (N=52) the role of superintendent was 100 percent a male role with an average age between thirty-five and forty-four years. Their general health was reported to be from good to excellent with from zero to three days per year being reported as sick leave. Their job is perceived as only slightly more than mildly stressful. Although most superintendents (N=28) reported that they had not knowingly been aware of any stress/strain related illnesses while employed as a superintendent, the most commonly reported illness was hypertension (N=8). Peptic ulcer, allergies, headaches, and pains in extremities were other stress/strain related illnesses reported with fewer frequencies. Walking was the most popular physical activity reported (N=16). Gardening (N=9), hunting (N=6), and fishing (N=10) were also popular activities while jogging, golf, and swimming were mentioned by fewer superintendents as physical activities. Only six out of fifty-two reported no physical activities.

Generally, these superintendents perceived themselves as relatively healthy individuals. They enjoy good to excellent health, are seldom sick, stay physically active, and view their job as less stressful, i.e., mildly stressful on a scale from not stressful, mildly stressful, moderately

stressful, to highly stressful. Hypertension leads the types of illness reported, but its incidence is relatively low. Table I reveals that they only "rarely" to "sometimes" experience the various stressors presented. "The need to get things done on time," "lack of communication," "lack of performance feedback," and "inability to satisfy conflicting demands of various people" are the only stressors indicated by superintendents which occur more frequently than "sometimes."

Central Office Administrators

Central office administrators (N=50) included assistant superintendents, directors, specialists, supervisors, and coordinators. Thirty-one of these administrators were male and nineteen female with an average age between thirty-five and forty-four, but with considerably more range in age represented--age twenty-five to more than fifty-five. Their general health was reported to be from good to excellent with from four to seven days per year being reported as sick leave. Females reported more days of sick leave than males. They perceived their job as from moderate to high in stress. Higher degrees of stressfulness were perceived by the females. The largest number of central office administrators reported no stress related illnesses (N=28). Hypertension (N=8, all male), peptic ulcer (N=4), nervous stomach (N=2), and migraine headaches (N=4, all female) were reported illnesses. Walking and jogging (N=26) were the most frequently reported physical activities. Only seven individuals reported no physical activity, while biking, aerobic exercise, swimming, and racquetball were mentioned from four to ten times each. Hunting and fishing were activities not mentioned by central office administrators.

Although this group of administrators perceived themselves as generally healthy, they reported, with greater frequency, higher incidences of job stress, and they are away from work while sick more often. As a group they are physically active particularly with aerobic-type activities (walking, jogging, aerobic exercise, swimming and biking). Females report more sick leave and higher levels of job stress. Hypertension was reported only by males and was the highest frequency illness/condition reported. Table I reveals a general perception of stressors as being "rarely" to "sometimes." "The need to get things done on time" and "unclear responsibilities" were the only stressors noted between "sometimes" and "often."

Secondary Principals

Secondary school principals (N=61) were predominantly male (N=55) with an average age between thirty-five and forty-four. Their general health ranged between good to excellent with the majority in the excellent category. Only zero to three days per year were reported as sick leave. Females reported slightly higher incidences of sick leave than males. They reported their jobs as moderately to high in stress. Females reported higher stressfulness than males, i.e., all six females reported high job stressfulness. Forty out of sixty-one persons reported no stress related illnesses. Hypertension (N=10) was reported only by males, and only colitis and nervousness were mentioned (N=5) by others. Walking and fishing (N=14 each) were the most frequently mentioned physical activities with a wide range of other activities reported, i.e., softball (N=13), swimming (N=8), jogging (N=7), aerobic exercise (N=6), golf (N=11), hunting (N=5), and biking, gardening, tennis, basketball, and racquetball being mentioned

from two to four times each. Ten persons reported no physical activity.

In summary, secondary principals perceive of themselves as healthy. In spite of a moderate to high reported perceptions of job stressfulness, they report few incidents of illness, and they are physically active as a group. Hypertension was mentioned most frequently and only by males. Table I shows only one domain of stressors exceeding the "sometimes" level, i.e., "the need to get things done on time." There were more stressors ranked as "never" occurring among this group of secondary principals than the other groups.

Elementary Principals

This sample was made up of sixty-three elementary principals, forty-eight of which were male and fifteen female. They were between the ages of thirty-five and forty-four in age. They perceived their general health as slightly better than good--more toward excellent. Slightly more than zero to three days of sick leave were reported with males reporting more sick leave days than females. Stressfulness of the job was rated between moderate and high with females reporting higher stressfulness than males. Twenty-eight reported no stress related illnesses. Hypertension, again only reported by males (N=9), led the stress related illnesses reported. The only other illnesses reported were stomach, intestines, colon related. Physical activities were popular with this group of elementary principals. Only ten reported no physical activities. Those activities most frequently reported were walking and jogging (N=22), aerobic exercise (N=9), golf, tennis, and biking (N=5-8 each), and swimming, gardening, softball, hunting, fishing, and dancing (from two to four times each). Table I shows only one

stressor ranked as slightly more than "sometimes" experienced, i.e., "being overworked." Elementary principals had the fewest stressors ranked as "nearly all of the time" (N=5).

Discussion

Generally, this sample of predominantly male public educational administrators between the ages of thirty-five and forty-four perceive their administrative roles as moderately stressful while identifying only few specific organizational stressors. Those stressors associated directly with the quality and quantity of time utilization were most often viewed as occurring more often than "sometimes." "The need to get things done on time" was reported by superintendents, central office administrators, and secondary principals as a stressor which caused administrative strain/stress. Other stressors ranked between "sometimes" and "often" were the communication stressors: "lack of communication" and "lack of performance feedback" (ranked by superintendents); "unclear responsibilities" (ranked by central office administrators); and "being overworked" (ranked by elementary principals). Therefore, it could be stated that time utilization, communication, and work load are the principal general and more common domains of stressors among this sample of public educational administrators (see Table I).

Perceptions of general health, days of sick leave, illnesses reported, and types of physical activities reported generally depict the administrators in this sample as healthy, i.e., less inclined toward high levels of individual strain. Relating this finding to the person-environment fit theory (French, Cobb and Rodgers, 1982) one could speculate that these administrators enjoy higher levels of "fit," i.e., the needs and abilities

of the worker fit the resources and demands of the work environment. Otherwise, in terms of the Darwin metaphor it could be said that these administrators are among the fittest who survive.

Another related notion upon which one could speculate is the Type A-Type B taxonomy of Friedman and Rosenman (1974). Perhaps this sample is less competitive and rushed, and, therefore, more associated with Type B behavior. However, this suggestion is less than consistent with that research cited in the Introduction and Theoretical Framework of this paper.

Hypertension or elevated blood pressure is clearly the most common reported "illness" in this study (about 17 percent of the sample), yet its incidence is not significantly different from random samples of the population. It is noteworthy, however, that hypertension in this study was 100 percent a male phenomenon. No female administrator reported hypertension as an "illness." The only supporting research finding this reseacher located was in the Framingham study (Haynes, Feinlieb and Kannel, 1978) where men were found to have higher Type A scores than women.

Physical activities play an important role in the lives of these administrators. Only approximately 13 percent of the total sample reported no physical activity. The remaining 87 percent reported healthful and conditioning types of physical activity, e.g., walking, jogging, swimming, and other predominantly outdoor, aerobic activities. It should be pointed out, however, that the wording of item #10 on the questionnaire might contain "demand characteristics" which could inflate the type and quantity of responses. Nevertheless, the role of physical activity among both male and female administrators appears to be related to somewhat lower than

anticipated levels of harmful occupational stress.

Other miscellaneous observations from the data of this study which are noteworthy include:

- Females reported more sick leave days than males except among elementary principals where males reported more.
- Stomach related "illnesses," e.g., peptic ulcer, colitis, were significantly more common among females than males.
- Gardening, hunting, and fishing were more sedate physical activities almost exclusively related to superintendents and secondary principals.
- The superintendents reported less average job stressfulness than the other administrative groups.
- Secondary principals reported fewer troublesome stressors than the other administrative groups.

Additional implications for further research include:

- Specific hypotheses to be tested, e.g., if physical activities are regular and aerobic in nature, then incidents of stress-related illness will be less; as the presence of stressors are perceived as less, perceptions of general health will improve; the Type B behavior pattern is directly proportionate to lower levels of stressor perception.
- Is there a relationship between manifestations of upward mobility (participation in degree and certification programs) among educational administrators and levels of stress?
- What is the relationship between types of occupational stressors and CHD among educational administrators?
- What critical decision-making scenarios (high stress events) in educational administration affect the biochemical changes associated with CHD?
- What is the relationship between factors of stress adaptability and the response to role related stressors?
- What relationship does the size, geographic location, and level of the school have upon selected stress responses of educational administrators?

- How do socially-derived (by questionnaire and observation) constellations/taxonomies of stressors compare with biochemically-derived (blood pressure, galvanic skin response, amounts of adrenaline in blood) constellations/taxonomies of stressors?

- What gender-related variables are related to stress patterns in various educational administrative roles?

- What are the implications of stress related research with educational administrators to intervention strategies in educational organizations?

The person-environment theoretical model is admittedly complex in its implications for organizational health. The exploratory data and analysis presented in this study demonstrate this complexity yet offer preliminary observations which prompt further exploration. The biological, psychological, and social variables suggested appear to act in ways which modify the relationship between stress inputs and outcomes. Much additional research regarding stress and educational administrative role and their expanding influence upon organizational life is needed.

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APPENDIX

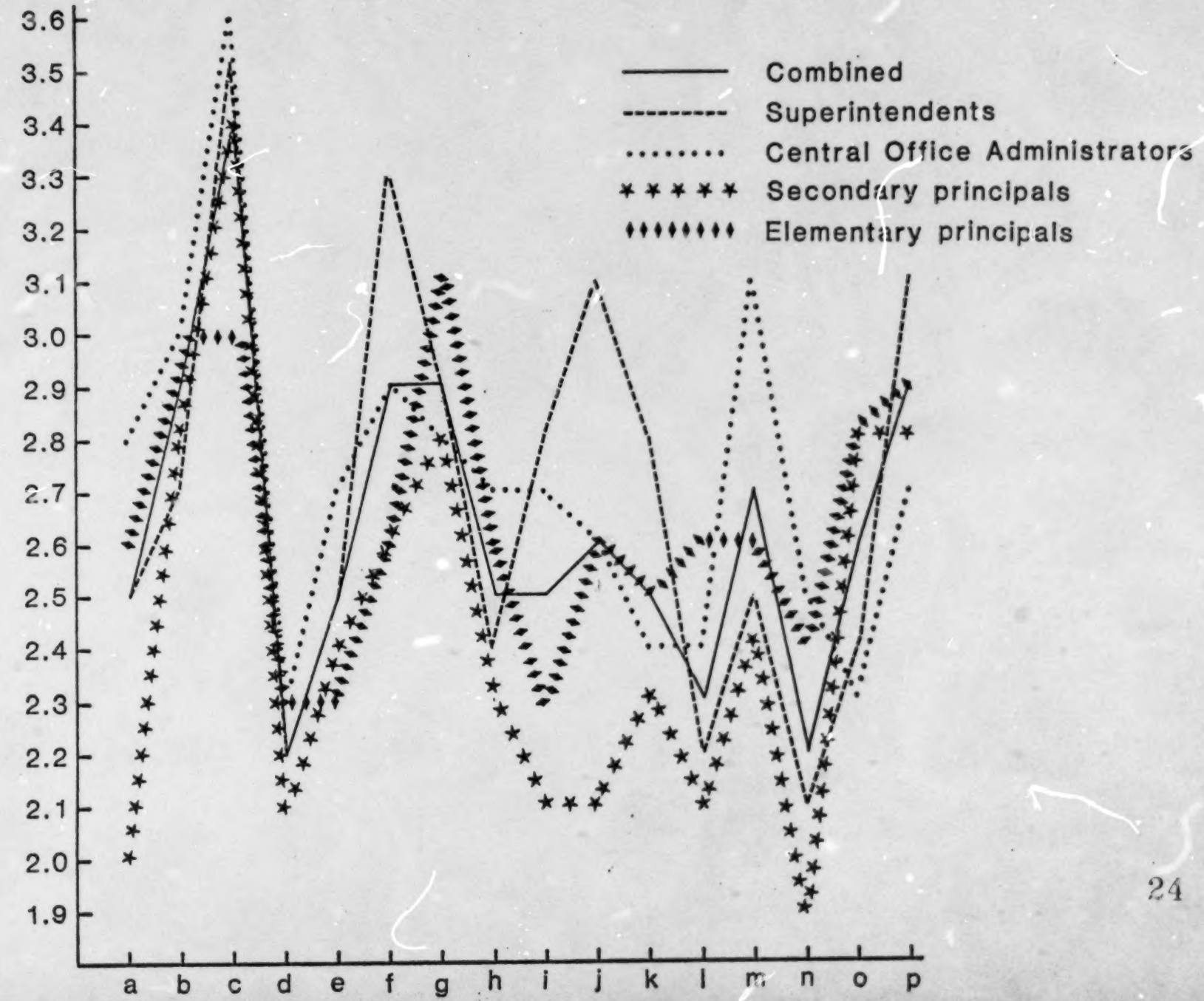
MEAN SCORES FOR STRESSORS

Administrative Roles

Stressors	COMBINED	SUPERINTENDENTS	CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS	SECONDARY PRINCIPALS	ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS
a	2.5	2.5	2.8	2.0	2.6
b	2.9	2.7	3.0	2.8	3.0
c	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.4	3.0
d	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.1	2.3
e	2.5	2.5	2.7	2.4	2.3
f	2.9	3.3	2.0	2.6	2.6
g	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.8	3.1
h	2.5	2.4	2.7	2.3	2.6
i	2.5	2.8	2.7	2.1	2.3
j	2.6	3.1	2.6	2.1	2.6
k	2.5	2.8	2.4	2.3	2.5
l	2.3	2.2	2.4	2.1	2.6
m	2.7	2.5	3.1	2.4	2.6
n	2.2	2.1	2.5	1.9	2.4
o	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.8	2.8
p	2.9	3.1	2.7	2.8	2.9

TABLE I

OCCUPATIONAL STRESSORS AND ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE



Thomas Wiggins.

ADMINISTRATIVE STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine how much stress you are under at work, what effects this stress has on your health, and whether regular exercise helps you cope with this stress. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential.

Instructions: Please complete this form as accurately and honestly as possible. Check the appropriate responses unless directed otherwise.

1. AGE:

__ less than 25
__ 25-34
__ 35-44
__ 45-54
__ more than 55

2. SEX:

__ Female
__ Male

3. YOUR POSITION:

_____

4. YOUR GENERAL HEALTH:

__ Excellent
__ Good
__ Fair
__ Poor

5. APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF SICK DAYS FOR PERSONAL ILLNESS IN THE LAST 2 YEARS:

__ 0-3 per year
__ 4-7 per year
__ 8-11 per year
__ more than 11 per year

6. LIST THE MAJOR STRESS RELATED ILLNESSES YOU HAVE HAD WHILE AN EDUCATOR (For example: elevated cholesterol or triglycerides, hypertension, heart disease, peptic ulcers, nervous conditions, etc.)

_____

_____

7. HOW STRESSFUL IS YOUR JOB?

__ Not Stressful
__ Mildly Stressful
__ Moderately Stressful
__ Highly Stressful

8. RANK THE POSITIONS IN YOUR PLACE OF WORK ACCORDING TO STRESSFULNESS:

1) (Most Stressful)_____
2) _____
3) _____
4) _____
5) _____
6) _____
7) _____
8) _____

(OVER)

9. HOW OFTEN DO THESE CAUSE YOU STRESS?	1. NEVER	2. RARELY	3. SOMETIMES	4. RATHER OFTEN	5. ALWAYS
a. Failure Of Bosses To Understand You					
b. Emergencies					
c. The Need To Get Things Done On Time					
d. Lack Of Acceptance By Co-workers					
e. Fear Of Making Errors/Consequences					
f. Communication Problems					
g. Being Overworked					
h. Inability To Influence Bosses' Decisions and Actions That Affect You					
i. Meetings/Conferences					
j. Lack Of Performance Feedback					
k. Lack Of Appreciation/Recognition					
l. Lack Of Support From Peers and Bosses					
m. Unclear Responsibilities					
n. Lack Of Authority					
o. Too Much Responsibility					
p. Inability To Satisfy Conflicting Demands Of Various People Around You					

10. LIST YOUR LEISURE TIME PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AND INDICATE THE AMOUNT OF TIME YOU SPEND DOING THEM. (For Example: walking, hiking, jogging, golf, tennis, swimming, biking, softball, baseball, basketball, handball, racketball, squash, soccer)

ACTIVITY	TIMES PER WEEK				
	<1	1	2	3	>3

11. COMMENTS: _____